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AUTHOR Bell, Mary Elizabeth
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ABSTRACT

The many everyday needs for manuscript writing--signs, maps, graphs, and posters--and the fact that it retains its legibility better than does cursive writing suggest the need for the continued use of manuscript beyond grades 1 and 2. Also, manuscript writing is preferable to cursive writing for children with poor coordination or spelling problems, for slow learners, and for left-handed children. Classroom opportunities for the practice of manuscript writing above third grade should be provided, and parents should be encouraged to understand its value and to help their children write correctly. (JM)

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Manuscript Writing after the Primary Grades

MARY ELIZABETH BELL
Professor of Education
Murray State University
Murray, Kentucky

There are many needs for manuscript writing in everyday life, calling for continued instruction in the intermediate grades.

MANUSCRIPT writing is now an established part of the elementary school curriculum, and practically all opposition to it in the primary grades has been overcome. However, there still exist some controversies and issues concerning manuscript, and some of the questions have yet to be answered. Some of these questions revolve around the continued use of manuscript after the first and second grades. Too frequently, it is ignored after cursive writing is introduced.

The manuscript writing which is in use today is derived from the unjoined, almost vertical letters used by the scribes of the fifteenth century. Gradually this manuscript developed into cursive writing, or joined letters, probably due to the influence of copper-plate engraving.

The English were the first to see the need for a simplified form of writing and to bring this unjoined writing into their schools. And it was in England, that the term "manuscript" was given to the unjoined writing. Soon after this, in 1921, manuscript writing was introduced into the schools in the United States.

When manuscript writing was first introduced into the curriculum, it was expected to supplant cursive writing altogether; instead, it has served as the form of writing to precede cursive writing. This dual system of handwriting has caused some criticism by a few people.

A dual system can be successful if each form of writing is recognized as a means of communication, and if both forms are used by children throughout their school life. Cursive writing need not be the required form for every older student and every adult to use, and it need not be used to the exclusion of manuscript. Since manuscript writing is a practical form of writing that can serve all writing needs, it may be used in connection with cursive writing, or it may be used exclusively.

Needs for Manuscript Writing

When we think of the many uses adults and students have for manuscript writing, we can see why it is desirable to review manuscript frequently after the transition has been made. Listed below are some of the uses students and adults will have for manuscript.

1. Students all through school need manuscript for maps, graphs, posters, labels, and signs.
2. Adults and older students find a need for manuscript when filling out important papers.
3. High-school boys use manuscript, or a similar form, in shop work.

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In addition to using manuscript for only special occasions, some children may profit by using manuscript writing exclusively.

1. Children who have poor coordination or who write very poorly in cursive writing are able to form the manuscript letters with little difficulty.
2. Some or most slow-learning children tend to develop skill with manuscript faster than they do with cursive writing.
3. Left-handed children who experience difficulty with cursive may have less difficulty with unjoined strokes.
4. Since the quality of cursive writing decreases more rapidly with increase in speed than does manuscript for some children, it may be desirable to encourage children to use manuscript for much of their daily writing.

Misunderstandings about Manuscript

Various names have been given to this unjoined form of writing—printing, print script, print writing, and manuscript writing. Print script or print writing is misleading nomenclature, because parents and the general public tend to confuse script with "block printing" or laborious hand lettering. Since the term "printing" is associated with babyishness, parents and children tend to look upon "print" writing as the form for very small children and to look upon cursive writing as the form for older students and adults.

Many have thought that manuscript is much slower than cursive writing because it requires that the pencil be lifted between letters. Moreover, the appearance of an manuscript page may give the reader an impression that it has been painstakingly handlettered, thus leading him to the conclusion that manuscript is impractical for communications.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Some studies and tests have shown that there is no significant difference in the writing rate of the two forms when the instruction and practice of both are comparable for upper-grade students. One difference that should be noted, however, is that the legibility of cursive writing seems to decrease more rapidly under speed pressure than does manuscript.

One criticism of the use of manuscript alone was that a child would not be able to read cursive writing. Tests have shown that children who have acquired reasonable skill in reading manuscript have no difficulty in reading cursive writing unless the cursive writing has an extreme slant or has been written carelessly. But this kind of writing would be difficult for anyone to read.

Another argument against the exclusive use of manuscript was that manuscript signatures would not be accepted. Virgil Herrick found that most banks will accept a signature written in manuscript if it is the person's regular signature. In fact manuscript is accepted, or preferred, by many people in large businesses. In a questionnaire to executives of large corporations, Patrick J. Groff found that over 14 per cent preferred that their employees use cursive writing, that 33 per cent believed manuscript writing suited their purposes better, and nearly 53 per cent didn't care which form was used so long as it was legible.

Some people have said that fewer mistakes occur in spelling when cursive writing is used because the child is writing the word as a whole. However, studies may have been insufficient to draw accurate conclusions. As an example, in a test with third-grade children, the results showed there was very little relationship

of manuscript and cursive to accuracy in spelling. If a child missed a word in one style, he tended to miss it in the other style, also. It was observed, however, that the children had become so accustomed to cursive writing that they found it difficult to change to manuscript.

On the other hand, one wonders if there might be some advantages in using manuscript for spelling. Some teachers have found that children with major spelling problems improved when they changed from cursive to manuscript. It would seem that it would be profitable to experiment with the use of manuscript in such cases.

How Teachers May Encourage Use of Manuscript

Just allowing a child to keep or retain manuscript is not sufficient for upper-grade students. Children in and above the third grade should be given opportunities to practice and to use manuscript so they can continue to write it fluently. If children were given an opportunity to work on manuscript, perhaps once a week, they would retain the fluency they had in the primary grades.

Other suggestions:

1. Never refer to mauscript as "printing," nor to cursive writing as "real writing" because such reference is misleading and prevents acceptance of manuscript as a form of writing.
2. Help parents to understand the value and need for manuscript. By explaining the values and use of manuscript, many objections to manuscript will be overcome.
3. Furnish parents with copies of the manuscript alphabet, both capital and small letters, in order that they may help their children correctly.
4. Use manuscript on the chalkboard and on charts in the classroom.
5. Allow individuality in manuscript *if* legibility is not sacrificed. A student's writing can be distinctive and show certain characteristics. The letters may be vertical, or they may be written with a slight slant.
6. Allow children to use manuscript in daily lessons when they so desire.
7. If it is found to be necessary, permit an immature child to use manuscript writing for most of his daily work.

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